
ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



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NH DES Wetlands Bureau -- Commonly Asked Shoreline Questions

Q. How long may a dock be?

A. On shoreline frontage of at least 75 feet in length, a seasonal dock can be 6 ft. wide by 40 ft. long on a lake 1,000 acres or larger. The standard size for docks on smaller lakes is 6 feet wide by 30 feet long. On shoreline frontage less than 75 feet long, the standard size for a dock is 4 feet wide by 24 feet long.

Q. What can I do to stop erosion of the shoreline?

A. Water runoff should be diverted away from steep slopes and any exposed soils should be quickly covered with fiber matting and seeded. To prevent erosion, maintain or plant trees and shrubs which provide a good root structure to stabilize the bank as well as provide cover for the soil. Rock rip-rap may be permitted by DES only where waves or changes in water elevations render other methods ineffective.

Q. Can I install a piling or crib dock?

A. Seasonal docks are the least impacting type of dock construction. Permanent docks are permitted only in areas where wind or wave conditions prevent the use of a seasonal pier on the frontage. Seasonal docks are less intrusive on lakes as they are removed during the winter months and do not require the use of aerators to protect them from ice damage. The use of aerators disrupts a lake's cycle and creates dangerously thin ice -- a hazard to snowmobilers and ice fisherman.

Q. Can I dredge the area around a dock?

A. Permits may be obtained from DES to remove rocks that are navigational hazards. A rock is considered a navigational hazard to the owner if it is within a boatslip or approach to a dock and within 3 feet of the water surface and within 50 ft. of the shoreline. Dredging of sediments is permissible only in and around structures such as boathouses or breakwaters, which cannot easily be modified to attain necessary water depths for docking.

Q. Do I need a permit for a boat lift or a jet ski lift?

A. YES! A permit is needed to install all boat lifts or jet ski lifts, including seasonal ones. A boat lift equals one boatslip.

Q. Can I get a permit for a canopy over a boatslip?

A. Canopies may be permitted in areas where they do not obstruct views from adjacent properties. Canopies must be constructed of a removable frame, and the fabric covering must be removed during the winter.

Q. Is it okay to put sand on a beach?

A. A permit is required for replenishment of sand. Sand on existing beaches may be replenished once every 6 years with a permit from the Wetlands Bureau. Sand may be placed only on land above the high water line. The DES encourages the perching of existing beaches with the installation of a structure to retain sand on the beach and prevent sand from being eroded into the lake. Sand carries phosphorus into our lakes, which causes algae growth, turns the water green, and accelerates the aging of lakes.

Q. Is it okay to build a deck, patio, or similar structure along the shore?

A. In general, permits for structures that facilitate land-based activities are not approved for transferring those activities to the water or areas within jurisdiction. Repairs to legally existing structures require a permit before any work begins. The N.H. Comprehensive Shoreland Protection Act (RSA 483-B) does not allow the placement of accessory structures within 20 feet of the shoreline and limits the size of any accessory structure within 50 feet of the shoreline to a maximum of 150 square feet.

Q. Is it okay if I cut vegetation along the shoreline?

A. The Comprehensive Shoreland Protection Act requires that a healthy, well-distributed stand of trees, saplings, shrubs, and ground cover be maintained within 150 feet of public waters. The less a natural woodland buffer is disturbed, the greater its ability to prevent the degradation of water quality.

Q. Can I expand my docking facility to accommodate my new boat?

A. Docking facilities in excess of standard dimensions may be permitted when the applicant has demonstrated that at least one of the following is present:

- A safety hazard due to wind or other weather conditions;
- Conditions such as shallow water depth would prevent the use of the waterfront by any motorized boat;
- The applicant has a permanent disability that requires larger dimensions in order to safely use the water; or
- Less environmental impacts result to the shoreline and waterbody if structures are clustered.

Q. Can I use pressure-treated lumber for my dock?

A. The Department of Environmental Services advises against using pressure treated wood in any waters of the state due to possible effects on aquatic ecosystems. However, there is currently no law or regulation that prohibits pressure treated lumber from being used for a dock. Sawing the boards, however, should be done away from the lake so that no sawdust enters the water. Sawdust from pressure treated lumber becomes part of lake sediments and is harmful to fish and wildlife if it becomes part of the food chain.

